

FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: August 18, 2011

Agenda Item: Nix Ranch Conservation Easement

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Endorse Course of Action

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background

FWP proposes to purchase a conservation easement on 792 acres of Yellowstone River bottomland and 19,886 acres of upland rangeland owned by the Nix Ranch located southwest of Hysham along Interstate-94. The easement purchase and development gives FWP the opportunity to work with a successful ranching operation on a large scale to: (1) develop long term riparian and upland wildlife habitat best management practices, (2) increase public recreational opportunity, (3) protect healthy blocks of sagebrush, and (4) support activities that encourage sustainable land management practices such as rest rotation grazing. The property is located near the Yellowstone River and would provide the public with a number of recreational opportunities including: hunting, fishing, wildlife watching and agate picking. Management activities would include development and implementation of a rest rotation grazing system and the evaluation and management of irrigated cropland to determine management strategies to benefit livestock and wildlife to include riparian restoration, dense nesting cover, brood cover and winter food plots.

Public Involvement Process & Results

Upon approval to proceed, terms, covenants and a management plan will be developed. Once these are formulated and are mutually agreed upon an Environmental Assessment will be completed, with a public-comment period and additional public involvement.

Alternatives and Analysis

Proposed Action: FWP proposes to purchase a conservation easement on 792 acres of riparian bottomland and 19,886 acres of upland rangeland. FWP would secure permanent public access to this land, as well as develop upland and riparian habitat management plans and procedures on a large landscape. This project would conserve animal and plant species biodiversity and important wildlife habitat.

No Action alternative: FWP would forgo the opportunity to partner with willing landowners to develop, manage and enhance the property. There would be no guarantee of public access to the property for recreation and land access would not be secured for the public.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends approval by the FWP Commission to proceed with the purchase of the conservation easement from the Nix Ranch. This project will conserve and protect important riparian/cropland, rangeland habitats along the Yellowstone River and provide permanent public recreational access.

Proposed Motion

I move that the commission grant FWP preliminary approval to negotiate a conservation easement on 20,678 acres from the Nix Ranch.